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ABSTRACT

School culture, as defined in this study, consists of norms, beliefs, and values that provide teachers with a sense of continuity against change generated by students, parents and reform movements. The first six norms of school culture, which appear to be interdependent and work together to create an effective school culture for change, are collegiality, experimentation, high expectations, trust and confidence, tangible support, and referring to a knowledge base. The remaining six norms, which demonstrate effective teacher interaction with each other and their administrators, are appreciation and recognition, caring and humor, involvement in decision-making, protection of what is important, traditions, and open communication. The population sample was drawn from two elementary schools within the same county of a rural mid-Atlantic state that were in the process of making a change to whole language instruction. Norms for which significant differences were found included: collegiality, experimentation, expectation, trust and confidence, reaching out to the knowledge base, caring, celebrating, and humor, protecting what's important, involvement in decision-making, and honest, open communication. The major conclusions were that the presence of these norms tends to encourage teacher change and that the norms increase as teacher change progresses. The School Culture Survey is appended. (Contains 32 references.) (LH)

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Examining the Relationship Between School Culture and Teacher Change

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Examining the Relationship Between School Culture and Teacher Change

Karyn E. Schweiker-Marra

Over the past several years, the importance of school culture is being increasingly emphasized in the thinking of researchers and practitioners with respect to teacher change (Deal, 1987; Joyce, 1990). A culturalistic approach to teacher change espouses that in order to create change it is necessary to both understand and use the school culture as experienced by both the teachers and the school's community (Sarason, 1971). Without this understanding, emphasis is placed strictly upon technical knowledge and expert control, rather than school culture and the ways that it frustrates or facilitates teacher change (Popkewitz, Tabahnick, & Wehlage, 1982; Sarason, 1971).

School culture is the" socially shared and transmitted knowledge of 'what is' and 'what ought to be' symbolized in act and artifact" (Wilson, 1971, p. 90). This knowledge includes the norms, beliefs, and values of a school which provides teachers with a sense of continuity against the change generated by students, parents, and change movements. Studies show that school culture can both frustrate and facilitate teacher change (Bates, 1987; Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987; Scheurich, & Imber, 1991). School culture frustrates change when the norms held by the teachers conflict with the change being purported (Berger, 1967). In a study by Glickman (1985) four factors were held to be largely responsible for preventing teacher change. These four factors roughly correspond to the school cultural norms of collegiality, communication, decision-making, and reaching out to a knowledge base. Other studies (Joyce, Murphy, & Showers, 1990; Johnston, Bickel, & Wallace, 1990) pinpointed the school cultural norms of decision-making and lack of a strong knowledge-base as the source of teacher failure to change. Likewise, school culture can facilitate change when they are held in common and agree with the intented change. Teachers in a study by Pace (1992) were facilitated in their change through the norms of tangible support and collegiality.

Norms are those "should's, ought's, do's and don't's " within the school culture (Maxwell and Thomas, 1991). Saphier and King (1985) believe that "if certain norms of school culture are strong, improvements in instruction will be significant, continuous, and widespread; without these norms change will depend upon individual teachers and confined to certain classes" (p. 67). Through a culmination of research, Saphier and King have identified twelve norms of school culture which contribute to teacher change. The first six of these norms of school culture appear to have dependent relationships with one another. They are (1) collegiality, (2) experimentation, (3) high expectations, (4) trust and confidence, (5) tangible support, and (6) referring to a knowledge base.

These first six norms work together to create an effective school culture for change. Schools, where teacher change occurs, have high expectations and collegiality to support teacher experimentation. This collegiality is built upon teacher trust and confidence. Their administrators treat them as professionals by offering them tangible support in the form of professional development. This professional development affords teachers the opportunity to reach out to a knowledge base. The knowledge base involves both the formal knowledge base of the discipline and the how-to knowledge base of teaching methods.

The final six norms of school culture involve: (7) appreciation and recognition, (8) caring and humor, (9) involvement in decision-making, (10) protection of what's important, (11) traditions, and (12) honest, open communication. These norms demonstrate effective teacher interaction with each other and their administrators. This is achieved through a school culture that promotes both caring for each other and appreciation. Administrators can cultivate this appreciation by involving the faculty in decision-making and protecting their valuable time. Teachers, along with administrators, are responsible for developing a culture of caring, celebrating, and humor. Teachers are also responsible for creating traditions and maintaining open, honest communication with each other.

While research (Saphier & King, 1985) has provided norms for a school culture that would facilitate teacher change, few studies (Purkey & Smith, 1982) have concentrated on this area. Furthermore, these studies have attempted to manipulate the school culture without examining, from the teachers' point of view, what beneficial influences may already exist or factors which may inhibit change. Therefore, the major objective of this proposal is to research the relationship between school culture and teacher change. The theoretical question is whether school cultural norms are affected by teacher change or if teacher change is affected by school cultural norms during an implementation of a new curriculum.

Method

Sample

Identification of population. The population for this study was drawn from two schools within the same county of a rural mid-Atlantic state. The faculties were both engaged in a similar change, that being a transition to a whole language curriculum. In order to identify schools for the study, a committee of experts from a local university and the county school system determined which schools were in the process of making a change. This committee consisted of a university professor in charge of supervising field placements in the county, a reading professor involved with placement of university reading students, and an experienced Chapter I teacher in the county. One school was identified as having a grass-roots transition to whole language and the other was identified as having a top-down transition to whole language. Both of these schools were similar in size, number of students, and number of faculty. Code names for the schools were used to

provide confidentiality.

Schools. The two schools had begun their transition into whole language differently. In the first school, Salem Elementary, the fourteen teachers had worked to improve reading instruction for several years as requested by their principal. Their attempts included implementing S.S.R., daily reading alouds, and reading incentive programs. Impetus to use whole language was furthered by the arrival of a whole language teacher whose enthusiasm sparked an interest in her colleagues.

At the second school, Richmond Elementary, the change occurred after one teacher attended a week-long whole language workshop in Boston during the summer of 1990. Upon returning, she announced that in the forth-coming year she would use whole language rather than the basal method. In the next year, there was a rippling effect upon the other teachers at her grade level. Believing that whole language was a more current approach, they felt compelled to follow their colleague and they began to investigate whole language approaches. As a result, whole language approaches were being adopted by several of the seventeen teachers throughout the school.

Participants. All teachers who worked at either of the two schools during the 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 school years were included in the study. This brought a total of eleven participants completing the questionnaire at Salem School and nineteen at Richmond School. This included the administrators at both schools.

DataCollection

Three types of data were gathered in order to note changes in either school culture or teacher change. A questionnaire was constructed to determine the norms of school culture perceived by the respondents as being typical of their own school culture. This questionnaire was modified from an instrument created by Sangor and Curley (1991) based upon Sapier and King's (1985) twelve norms of school culture. The questionnaire required participants to note changes in the school culture over the two year period, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

For the purpose of noting teacher change in instructional practices, teacher's lesson plans were collected over a one week period. These lesson plans included the areas of language arts, as well as all content areas and were photocopied.

Informal observations were made which included impressions of the individual teachers' role in teaching, their classroom designs, teaching methods to foster choice and any perceived changes in teaching methods over the two year time period.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire utilizing Saphier and King's (1985) twelve norms of school culture was

found and modified. This questionnaire was designed by Sagor and Curley (1991) and had been utilized in two other studies. The Sagor and Curley questionnaire included twelve cultural norms [redivided into fourteen cultural norms] and required the participants to note their presence by stating an example and rating their importance. The modified questionnaire for this study focused upon the participants perceptions of the existence and importance of these norms in a given school. All participants were asked to rate each norm on a four point likert-type scale.

Procedure

Observations and impressions of the individual teachers along with any perceived changes were made during the first three months of the study and during the last three months of the study. Teachers were asked to provide copies of one week's lesson plans that were typical of their teaching styles both at the beginning and end of the study.

The questionnaire was given to all teachers who had been staff members at the two participating sites for the 1991-92 and 1992-93 school years. They were then asked to respond for each of the two school years with regard to their placement for that time period.

Data Analyses

The observations and lesson plans from the start of the study were compared with those from the end of the study for any noticable changes in regard to teacher change. Any noted changes were examined using Poeton's 12 principles of whole language (1990). The committee of experts utilized these principles in order to note changes.

The data from the 30 questionnaires were analyzed using a paired t-test to determine norm score differences between Phase 1 and Phase 2. The dependent measures were the twelve school cultural norms while the independent variable was time (Phase 1 to Phase 2). Teacher change was operationalized through the separate scores for each phase. Analysis was conducted separately on each of the twelve norms. The paired t-test was selected in order to provide information on the significant changes for each of the cultural norms for all participants from Phase 1 to Phase 2.

Results

There were significant differences from the .001 level to the .07 level on nine of the twelve school culture norms for all participants (See Table 1). Norms for which significant differences were found included: (1) collegiality, (2) experimentation, (3) expectation, (4) trust and confidence, (5) reaching out to the knowledge-base, (6) caring, celebrating, and humor, (7) protecting what's important, (8) involvement in decision-making, and (9) honest, open communication.

The following norms were not found to be significantly different across Phases 1 and 2: (1) appreciation and recognition, (2) traditions, and (3) tangible support.

Table 1

Means, t value, and Probability for All Participants Norm Scores From Phase 1 to Phase 2

Norm	Phase 1 Mean	Phase 2 Mean	t value	Prob. (2-tail)
1. Collegiality	3.27	3.57	-1.87	.07
2. Experimentation	3.03	3.53	-3.74	.0008
3. Expectation	3.4	3.6	-1.989	.06
4. Trust	3.27	3.5	-2.25	.03
5. Support	3.27	3.27	0	0
6. Knowledge	3.1	3.43	-3.01	.005
7. Appreciation	2.83	3.0	-1.30	.20
8. Humor	3.22	3.53	-1.98	.06
9. Protection	3.1	3.37	-2.80	.009
10. Decision-making	2.97	3.33	-3.00	.006
11. Traditions	3.3	3.43	-1.278	.21
12. Communication	2.9	3.27	-2.362	.03

Df= 29 N=30

Discussion and Conclusion

Conclusions for significant norms. The following norms were found to have shown significant changes for all participants: (1) collegiality, (2) experimentation, (3) high expectations, (4) trust and confidence, (5) reaching out to the knowledge-base, (6) caring/celebrating/humor, (7) protection of what's important, (8) decision-making and (9) honest, open communication.

There are several reasons for an increase in these norms. Since all participants for both schools included non-changing teachers as well as transitioning teachers it is conceivable that these norms naturally increased over time due to the teachers' everyday relationships with each other. For instance, collegiality, caring/ humor, trust and confidence, and open, honest communication would tend to increase as teachers become more familiar with each other over the two phases. Experimentation, expectations, and reaching out to the knowledge-base may increase as teachers become more familiar with the norms and standards of that particular school and attempt to adjust their behaviors to those of their colleagues and/or administrator. Protection of what's important and decision making may have increased as an outgrowth of the principal's improved relationship with the faculty.

Since these norms increased during the time of teacher change it is conceiveable that the change produced a growth in these particular norms. For instance, it is reasonable that a change in teaching approaches would necessitate a reaching out to gain knowledge of new practices. Elbaz (1983) found that teacher change must focus upon teacher's practical knowledge, and Leinhart

(1988) showed that situational knowledge affected teacher acceptance or rejection of change. Recently, Mills and Pollack (1993) recognized the need for professional development in order to provide the knowledge necessary for a curriculum change. To acquire this knowledge teachers could conceiveably confer with colleagues through open, honest communication. The importance of collegiality in fostering teacher change is supported by the works of Staessens (1991) who found that professional relationships among teachers affected teacher acceptance of change. The need for open, honest communication in teacher change processes is supported by Joyce, Murphy, Showers, and Murphy (1990). Additionally, they related teacher change with teachers' shared understanding and common language. Teachers' positive reactions to each other during the period of seeking knowledge could result in an increase in both caring/humor and trust /confidence.

Experimentation may have increased for all participants due to both the influences of the reforming teachers advocating the change at Richmond or the administrators influencing the change at Salem. The work of Jett-Simpson, (1992) Dana and Fichtman (1992), and Woloszyk (1992) all support risk-taking or experimentation through teacher collaboration in promoting teacher change.

An increase in decision-making would tend to increase as all participants made a decision whether or not to participant in the transition to whole language. Glickman (1985) showed that a low level of teacher decision-making served as an obstacle to teacher change. Increases in both expectations and protecting what's important may be due to the teachers' perceptions of their principals' reaction to the changes in both schools. Those teachers, who made the change, may have perceived their principal as protecting their time in order to bring about that change while teachers, who did not make the transition, felt their principal protected their decision not to change.

Changing teachers at both schools may have increased their expectations as a result of their success with the new approach and their principal's response to that success. Non-changing teachers increased expectations may be the results of their perceived improvement in their traditional approach over the same period of time and their principal's response to that improvement. The affect of expectations upon teacher change was supported by Ron Edmonds in a series of studies (1979a, 1979b, 1981). He found that high expectations for achievement were , an important in school change.

Conclusions for non-significant norms. The following norms were found not to be significantly different from Phases 1 to 2: (1) appreciation and recognition, (2) traditions, and (3) tangible support. There are several reasons for these findings. Collectively, these norms may need more time to increase with two years being an insufficient time period. Individually, the norms of appreciation and recognition, traditions, and tangible support may be perceived by these schools as unimportant to both teacher change or maintaining their present approach to teaching. Since most of the participants were motivated (at least partially) by an intrinsic need to improve

their teaching methods, it may be that the intrinsic need superseded the external need for appreciation and recognition by others. It is also reasonable to believe that teachers at these schools who are actively seeking to make a change would be less concerned about traditions as they proceed through the change process than those teachers in a non-transitioning school. While the norm of support appears to be irrelevant to teacher change on the surface, it may actually be more important that the results demonstrate. Perhaps, rather than perceiving support as nonconsequential to the change, these teachers have internalizing their support from the results of student performance or reactions from others. This finding is in contrast with Glickman (1985) who perceived external support system as being necessary in order to encourage teacher change. There is no research to support or refute the findings on the two other norms.

The major conclusion of this study is that these specific school cultural norms interact with teacher change in two ways. The presence of these norms tend to encourage teacher change and the norms increase as teacher change progresses. While other research supports the roles these norms play in affecting teacher change, no other studies to date note that these norms become stronger forces in the school culture as a part of teacher change process.

In this study specific norms of school culture were found to be supportive of change in schools transitioning to whole language. Further research is needed to investigate whether this is true in other schools where other innovations are introduced. Purkey and Smith (1982) found in their mega-analysis that research reports often conflict regarding norms that were present in school cultures where teachers were changing. Conclusions from this study showed that some norms became stronger forces in school cultures during the period of teacher change. More studies are needed to substantiate these findings.

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Appendix

School Code_____

Code Name_____

SCHOOL CULTURE SURVEY

Schools differ in many ways. One difference between schools is the character of their organizational "culture". The culture of an organization can be understood by the shared norms, values, and beliefs of members in that community. This survey asks you to think about **your school** as a community and to assess the degree to which each of the following norms/values are consistent features in the workday of **your school**. Since culture of the school can change over time I would like you to rate your school for the past school year. Note with * if changed.

Rate each of these norm/values on the following scale:

1= Not characteristic of our school.

2= Seldom characteristic of our school.

3= Occassionally characteristic of our school.

4= Very characteristic of our school.

Remember the focus of the survey is your school as a whole.

In the first column is the norm/value; next the rating for the school year

NORM/ VALUE RATING

1) Collegiality
(Getting along as a staff)

2) Experimentation
(risk-taking)

3) High Expectations
(Of yourself & school)

4) Trust & Confidence
(In self by others)

5) Tangible Support
(Aid, Money, Time)

6) Reaching Out to the
Knowledge Base

7)Appreciation and Recognition
(Of your work or effort)

8) Caring, Celebrations, &
Humor

9) Protection of What's
Important (school goals)

10) Involvement in Decision
Making

11) Traditions
(Certain special events)

12) Honest, Open
communications

Thank you for completing this survey.

The norms/ values used in this survey were derived from the work of Matthew King and Jonathan Saphier (1985).